June 18, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C., 20515

The Honorable John Boehner  
 Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-204, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C., 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader Boehner:

In recent years, the United States has demonstrated historic leadership in the global fight against HIV/AIDS. We believe it is now time to take a fresh look at the epidemic here at home, bolster efforts to reduce HIV infections, and allow states to design programs with proven results. As supporters of effective and evidence-based HIV prevention, we are writing to urge you to remove the restriction on use of federal funds for syringe exchange programs (SEPs) in the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

After twenty years of experience with syringe exchange in the United States, with nearly 200 programs in operation across the country, it has been repeatedly demonstrated that SEPs counteract HIV epidemics among people who inject drugs and their sexual partners. Studies demonstrate that SEPs reduce HIV risk without increasing drug use. Syringe exchange programs have successfully prevented, contained, and reversed drug-related HIV epidemics in communities across the country, and provide a growing range of critical health care services, education, and support to vulnerable groups. Moreover, syringe exchange programs have helped countless substance users enter addiction treatment, and these programs serve as a crucial link to successful treatment and recovery programs through counseling and case management.

Syringe exchange has been extensively researched and endorsed by many leading experts and professional associations including the American Medical Association, the Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR), the Infectious Diseases Society of America, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Family Medicine, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Preventive Medicine, the American Nurses Association, the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care, the American Academy of Physician Assistants, and the HIV Medical Association.

The ban on federal funding for syringe exchange has limited the ability of local and state jurisdictions to respond effectively to the HIV epidemic. In 2005 alone, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that a total of 14,760 people who received an AIDS diagnosis or reported an HIV infection had a risk factor relating to intravenous drug use. Since the CDC began counting cases, that number amounts to more than 383,000 people. African Americans
account for over 50 percent of all AIDS cases attributed to injection drug use, while Latinos account for nearly 25 percent. Among women, an estimated 61 percent of AIDS cases are related to injection drug use.

For example, New York City has seen a 75 percent decrease in the prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs since implementing syringe exchange programs in 1992. However, federal funding restrictions limit syringe exchange coverage in New York and elsewhere to only a fraction of people in need of these prevention services.

Therefore, we urge the House leadership to review the evidence and to seek immediate removal of the ban on federal funding of syringe exchange. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress

Mike Castle
Member of Congress

Tammy Baldwin
Member of Congress

Robert A. Brady
Member of Congress

Howard L. Berman
Member of Congress

Lois Capps
Member of Congress

Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress

Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick
Member of Congress

Donna M. Christensen
Member of Congress

Yvette Clarke
Member of Congress
John Conyers Jr.
Member of Congress

Bill Delahunt
William D. Delahunt
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis
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Diana DeGette
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Vernon J. Ehlers
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Keith Ellison
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Chaka Fattah
Member of Congress

Sam Farr
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Bob Filner
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Raul M. Grijalva
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Luis V. Gutierrez
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Member of Congress

Eleanor H. Norton
Member of Congress

Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress

Jesse Jackson Jr.
Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

Member of Congress
William J. Jefferson
Member of Congress

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

Dennis J. Kucinich
Member of Congress

John Lewis
Member of Congress

James P. Moran
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Jim McDermott
Member of Congress

Ed Pastor
Member of Congress

Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr.
Member of Congress

Patrick J. Kennedy
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Jerold Nadler
Member of Congress

Ron Paul
Member of Congress

Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress
cc: The Honorable David R. Obey, Chairman, Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member, Appropriations Committee